

Historic Printing Plate Located

Counterfeiters Used Copper For Continental Currency

By Eric P. Newman

Many fascinating numismatic items are on display or in collections of museums and yet remain unstudied and unappreciated.

A few weeks ago Edward R. Barnsley, well known collector of Early American copper coinage, wrote me that he had just seen a copper plate for the reverse of a piece of Continental Currency in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia. He ordered a photograph at my request.

It would have been exciting to learn of the existence of a genuine copper plate for the printing of Continental Currency, but I knew that copper plates had not been used. A study of the photograph of the plate (see illustration) showed that it was an engraved plate for making counterfeits.

The plate was for the reverse of the \$7 denomination of the Continental Currency and was dated 1776. It was an excellent copy of the original even to the extent that the "a" of "and" is defective just as it is on the original.

A comparison with a genuine note (See illustration) was simple because the official test sheet of blue paper notes confirms which notes are genuine. There were certain specific differences between the copper plate and the original issue. The base of SEVEN is much higher than the base of DOLLARS on the plate whereas on the original they are on virtually the same level. On the plate the base of D in DOLLARS is higher than the bases of the other letters of the word whereas on the original they are on the same level. The most interesting difference is in the "secret marks" used by the printers of the original issue.

Secret marks were used on Continental Currency. The general public could not be informed as this would only have aided the counterfeiters. No record of the secret marks has ever been located and numismatists are left with the pleasure of finding them.

Above and below the leaf design are rows of ovals, 11 ovals in each row. Five ovals on the left are separated from six ovals on the right by an ornament flanked by colons.

Each oval is shaded by an internal curved line. Some shading is either at the top of an oval or at the bottom, but generally the shading appears to alternate from top to bottom.

Actually deliberate deviations seem to have been made as sec-

ret marks. Let us assign a number to each oval beginning at the left side of the top row and continue the numbering at the left side of the bottom row.

The ovals at the ends of each string will be numbers 1 and 5, 6 and 11, 12 and 16, 17 and 22. The position of the shading will be H for high and L for low. An examination of the reverses of the genuine issues of Continental Currency shows the following:

February 17, 1776 and May 9, 1776: 1-L, 5-L, 6-L, 11-H, 12-L, 16-L, 17-H, 22-L.

July 22, 1776 and November 2, 1776: 1-L, 5-L, 6-L, 11-H, 12-L, 16-L, 17-L, 22-L.

The counterfeit plate shows the following shading positions which. F-L are different from either of the genuine backs: 1-H, 5-H, 6-H, 11-L, 12-L, 16-L, 17-L, 22-H.

It is obvious that the counterfeiter did not feel it advisable to copy the "innocent mistakes" in the originals as they could easily have been corrected by turning the ovals over in the type frame. The arrangement of these shadings were therefore some of the secret marks which deceived the counterfeiter.

The copper plate is the work of a highly skilled engraver. There were only a handful of men living in America in 1776 who were capable of doing this task. The one proficient engraver who was loyal to the Tory cause was James Smith (Smithers) of Philadelphia.

Smith had remained in Philadelphia during the British occupation of the city, but when the British evacuated the city Smith had left for New York City which the British still occupied.

Smith was accused by Thomas Paine of counterfeiting Continental Currency for the British and was ordered to answer charges of treason in 1778 by the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. He returned to Philadelphia as an engraver after the Revolutionary War and like many others who were disloyal to the winning side was not confronted with further difficulty.

The British had sponsored most of the counterfeits of Continental Currency as a means of destroying its value in the hope of wrecking the economy of their military adversary. For a more complete discussion of the subject of the causes, methods and history of counterfeit Continental Currency reference is made to the author's articles, "Counterfeit Continental Currency Goes to War" in the January and Feb-

ruary, 1957 Numismatist and "The Successful British Counterfeiting of American Paper Money during the American Revolution" in the 1959 British Numismatic Journal, and to Kenneth Scott's book entitled "Counterfeiting in Colonial America".

There have been several erroneous references in numismatic articles and books to the production of Continental Currency from copper plates. Henry Phillips, Jr. in 1866 examined an altered copper plate of the Yorktown issue of 1778 and thought it was a plate for a genuine issue of Continental Currency. Actually it was a plate for counterfeiting.

A U. S. Government Treasury Department agent, Laurence D. Smith, in his book entitled "Counterfeiting, Crime against the People", published in 1944, said that "the Continental notes were exclusively printed from copper".

In the Scrapbook for October, 1960, an article entitled "The Continental Currency Makers" refers to "copper plates for the currency", etc. It is actually easy to feel any piece of Continental Currency and note the depression made in the paper by the set type. An engraved plate leaves no such impression. All of the official documents referring to the way Continental Currency is made comment on individually set letters or type. Even the official bulletin on counterfeits in 1779 points out which counterfeits are engraved on plates so as to make their detection simpler.

A list of the counterfeits of Continental currency as first published in 1957 has from time to

time been amended as items were called to the author's attention. The copy in the National Archives of the official 1779 broadside listing May 20, 1777 and April 11, 1778 counterfeits is incomplete due to deterioration of the paper. Its complete text has been located through the kindness of Dudley L. Vail Jr. and this increased the number of such counterfeits which the government was aware of from five to seven. Richard Picker and Harley Freeman have permitted me to study many questionable bills.

The collector's interest in counterfeit bills is as enthusiastic as the interest in genuine bills, stimulated in part by the official British backing of the counterfeit issues. Therefore a revised list of counterfeits follows with the hope that it will simplify their determination and that those who find new counterfeits will notify the author.

A descriptive list of counterfeits includes the following:

May 10, 1775; \$30: Engraved and usually pale. Top of second L in BILL lower than top of first L. Base of letters in Philadelphia uneven. Period after 1775 is lower than the center line of the figures. On the reverse the second h in Philadelphia is perfect instead of resembling the letter k as in the genuine.

November 22, 1775; \$5: Fictitious date of issue. The little finger of the hand in the vignette extends far to the right of the center branch instead of ending just left of it.

February 17, 1776; \$2/3: Plate B. Base of G in CONGRESS very

low. Second PH in PHILADELPHIA much larger than other letters on same line. Baseline of February very wavy.

February 17, 1776; \$2/3: No plate letter. (Only information from Pennsylvania Archives, Vol. V, p. 258 and Vol. XI, p. 234.)

February 17, 1776; \$4: Crude. No description. (Only information from Pennsylvania Archives, Vol. V, p. 258, Vol. XI, p. 234 and Pennsylvania Gazette of July 16, 1777.)

May 9, 1776; \$8: Engraved on whitish paper containing mica. In second to there is an old style s instead of a t. G instead C in CONGRESS. Top of 1 in date higher than tops of 77.

May 9, 1776; \$8: Engraved. Top of T in EIGHT beneath top border is straight instead of curved. B in Bearer partly under left upright of H in THIS instead of to right of upright.

July 22, 1776; \$7: Base of V in first SEVEN very high. Second S in SPANISH tilts right. Second 7 in date lower than first 7.

July 22, 1776; \$30: Top loop of G in Gold is open. Bottom loop of C in Congress is open. Left loop of P in Philadelphia is closed. Base of LL high in BILL. In the text the I in THIRTY is high. Tops of middle letters in Congress form a convex curve. J in July is under second s in passed and last three letters of July are lower case instead of upper case letters. In the text the O in DOLLARS is not as high as the adjacent L. B in BILL is much too narrow. On the reverse the second h in Philadelphia is perfect instead of resembling k.

July 22, 1776; \$30: The foregoing counterfeit corrected. Three capital letters are substituted for lower case letters in JULY. The J in JULY has been moved under the e of passed. The LL in BILL, the I in THIRTY and the O in DOLLARS have been aligned with adjacent letters. The other defects have not been corrected.

February 26, 1777; \$5: Only information from Virginia Gazette of May 15, 1778 (Dixon and Hunter); May 29, 1778 (Purdie.)

February 26, 1777; \$30: Engraved. In the date the base of 6 is level instead of higher than the 2. In SI in the motto the tail of the S is flat and extended.

February 26, 1777; \$30: Engraved. On reverse Sellers is misspelled. (Information from Connecticut Courant of November 10, 1778. See Mason's Monthly Coin & Stamp Magazine, June, 1871.)

May 20, 1777; \$6: Engraved. Many words in text are uneven and too small. Base of V in Value is high above base line instead of being level with it. Under vignette the period following DOLLARS is missing. (Described in Official Broadside.)

May 20, 1777; \$8: Engraved. Base of second I in MINORIBUS is high. Base line of harp rises to right instead of being horizontal. Words in text are too short. O and E in CONGRESS are low. (Described in Official Broadside.)

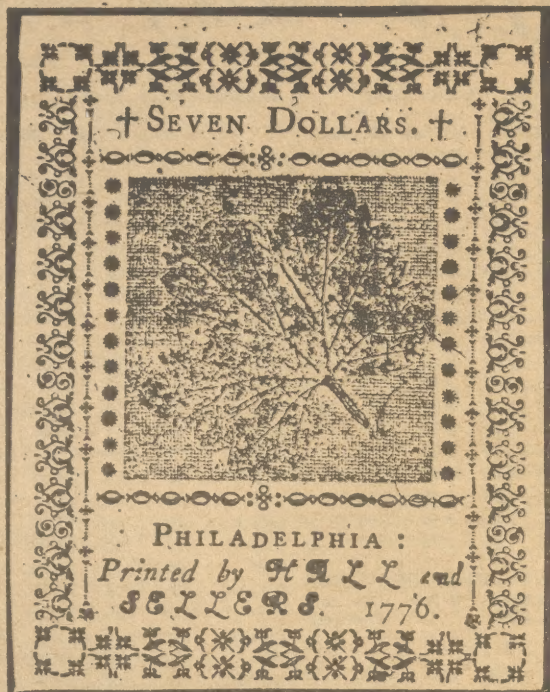
May 20, 1777; \$8: Crudely engraved note. The 2 in 20 in the date tilts to the left.

May 20, 1777; \$30: Deceptive counterfeit with broken M in May as in genuine. Bottom of S in FACIES touches circle instead of being clear of line. Y in second THIRTY slightly higher rather than slightly lower than T. Top of f in thereof same distance from border as comma above while on genuine f is much closer. Dot over second i in Philadelphia under center of lower curve of s above rather than just left of it.

July 2, 1777; \$30: Fictitious date of issue. Period instead of comma after July 2. Philadelphia.

12th March, 1778; \$40: Fictitious date of issue. Bases of last three letters of first Dollars are high.

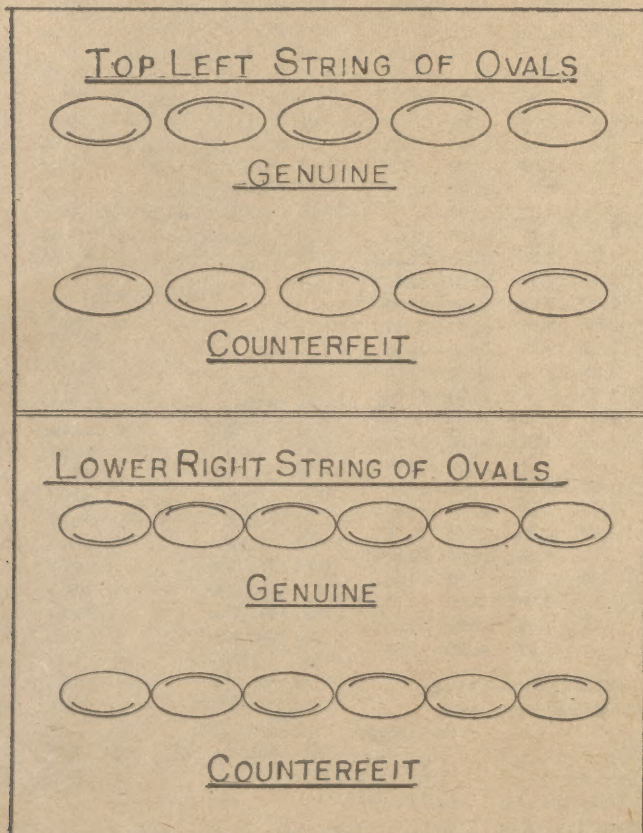
(Continued on Page 16)



Reverse of genuine \$7 July 22, 1776, Continental Currency.



Mirror image of reverse of counterfeit \$7 Continental Currency Copper Plate. The genuine note is actual size; this photo is a slight enlargement.



Schematic comparison between portions of genuine July 2, 1776, note and counterfeit copper plate.

Smedley Gives Techniques On How To Improve Worn Currency

By Glenn B. Smedley

Just as worn coin cannot be restored to mint condition by cleaning and polishing, so is it impossible to make a crisp, uncirculated note out of one which has been creased and crumpled.

But it is not difficult to improve the appearance of practically any such pieces of paper money, whether it be an old bank note or a government note of large or small size.

Generally speaking, the worse the condition of a note, the more improvement that can be made in its appearance.

Pencil marks and surface dirt on the margins and other unprinted parts of the note may yield to a soft eraser while the note is dry. In most cases, we do not make much effort to clean an entire note, for any such attempt will remove some of the ink and give a faded or "washed-out" appearance which may be less desirable than a generally soiled condition.

But creases, crumpled corners and edges, and folded edges of torn parts can be straightened and the paper restored to its original flat condition.

If the note has pressure adhesive (Scotch) tape on it, this may be removed as outlined in an article on page 269 in the March, 1959, issue of *The Numismatist*. This is a tedious and time-consuming process which requires great care and patience, but the results usually justify the effort. If the note has been repaired with water solvent adhesive tape, it will be removed during the following process of flattening the paper.

First, wet the note thoroughly with clean, warm water, either by soaking it in a pan or dish or by sprinkling the water lightly on both sides. Let the surplus water drop off or blot lightly with paper toweling or napkins. Folded over edges or tears within the note can be straightened out now by the



The note as purchased in a coin shop, complete but with corners turned down, etc.

use of a dull knife, using care not to cut or tear the folded parts no matter how small they may be.

If the note is badly soiled it may be rubbed lightly with a mild soap while thoroughly wet and spread out on a glass or other nonporous surface. However, if soap is used at all, care should be exercised not to overdo the cleaning and to rinse it quite well to remove all soap. We again caution against overcleaning.

After the cleaning and straightening have been completed, the surplus water should be removed by blotting lightly with absorbent paper, leaving the note damp and limp.

Then lay it out carefully on a clean blotter somewhat larger than the note, being careful to avoid any folds and to match up the edges of any tears. Cover the note with another clean blotter and place the "sandwich" in a press or on a flat surface with books or other weights on top.

It should be left to press and dry for a minimum of ten hours,



Same note after washing lightly and pressing. Same photographer in both instances.

although the drying time may be shortened by changing to dry blotters after an hour or so. Unless thoroughly dry, the note will tend to curl up when removed from the press.

If you have inadvertently pressed a crease in the note or find that torn edges do not match up, the note may be dampened again and the drying process repeated. (Some may ask "Why not press and dry notes with a warm iron?" We believe that the method described above gives better results.)

For repairing tears and frayed edges, we use the recently developed "Scotch Brand 810 Magic Mending Tape" referred to in the article cited about removing tape. It is very different from the ordinary pressure adhesive tape (more expensive, too) and, according to the manufacturer's claim and our own experience, it is satisfactory for permanent mending of paper.

(Reprinted from *The Numismatist*, May, 1961.)

Plate Found . . .

(Continued from Page 10)

No comma after March. Yorktown. Possibly an alteration.

11th April, 1778; \$4: Crudely engraved. R touches S in MORS. Top of oversized h in second the higher than bottom of p in Spanish.

11th April, 1778; \$5: Engraved. In SPANISH the A is too short and too near N. First S in CONGRESS smaller than second S. No comma after April. (Described in Official Broadside).

11th April, 1778; \$7: Crudely engraved. The tail of the s in Resolution sweeps under R. The second S in CONGRESS tilts to the right.

11th April, 1778; \$8: Engraved. The G in Gold is too large and too low. In the top border the 8 is black instead of white. (Described in Official Broadside).

11th April, 1778; \$20: Engraved. Base of second L in DOLLARS in text is lower than base of first L. The A and S in DOLLARS in the text are much smaller than the adjacent R. Continental Currency on the right side border is black instead of white. (Described in Official Broadside).

11th April, 1778; \$40: Engraved. Letters of irregular size and in crooked lines. There is an E instead of an F in FORTY in the right border. (Described in Official Broadside).

11th April, 1778; \$40: Crudely engraved. In the first Forty the r is in register with o instead of being much higher. The lower third of re in receive is below base of to. Second s of passed higher than first s. Right leg of A in top border thinner than left LEG. (Described in Official Broadside).

11th April, 1778; \$40: Deceptive. In the first Forty the r is almost in register with o instead of being much higher. Tail of y in first Forty turns sharply upward from horizontal instead of ending horizontally. Right base of first N in CONFEDERATION is high. The reverse has four instead of five pairs of leaves and one top leaf on the large twig. (Described in Official Broadside)

September 26, 1778; \$40: In Spanish the h is over the o of or rather than the r. Comma after second Dollars opposite top of s. S in Sept. under g instead of r in Congress.

September 26, 1778; \$40: Second L of BILL is not as high as first L. Base of m in milled slopes down to right. Base of o in second Dollars higher than base of D.

September 26, 1778; \$40: B in BILL under left side instead of center of D in Dollars. Left side of b in by just left of R in Resolution instead of under right tip of a.

September 26, 1778; \$40: End of loop of second 1 in first Dollars almost horizontal instead of sloping down to the left. Base of r in first Dollars higher than base of adjacent letters. Base of second to higher than bases of adjacent words. Hyphen after Con slopes down to right. The A in CONFEDERATION is small.

September 26, 1778; \$50: Comma after Philadelphia omitted. Bases of last three letters in Philadelphia rise to right. Base of bearer much higher than base of adjacent to. Center letters of value slope down to right. (Described in Connecticut Courant of March 14, 1780, p. 3)

September 26, 1778; \$50: Previous counterfeit corrected by inserting a comma after Philadelphia and moving the letters in that line to make a place for it. Other defects remain unchanged.

September 26, 1778; \$50: The top of the left border should have inverted FIFTY D, but erroneously has an E as its first letter. Base of the r in Dollars in the text is too high. The left base of R in Resolution is too high. Last two letters of passed have their bases too high.

September 26, 1778; \$60: Decep-

Honest Aaron Finds Hidden Pot Of Gold

The many recent reports of uncovered treasure have reminded Berlin Rowe, Modesto, Calif., of the time when Aaron McPherson of Todd County, Ky., found a hidden pot of gold and silver.

"Some 70 years ago," Rowe writes, "McPherson lived on a little hilly farm near the Russellville-Greenville (Ky.) Pike. One fall he was out hunting hogs and walking up a dry branch when he looked down and saw a silver dollar. He began to pick up silver dollars and \$20 gold pieces until the trail ran out.

"He searched around and soon found a big can rusting away at the roots of a big old poplar tree on the side of the branch. It was full of money, too heavy for him to carry, so he went home, hitched a mule to his sled, and hauled the money home.

"Old Honest Aaron advertised his find, I think it was in the Greenville Leader, something like this:

Aaron McPherson was hog hunting and found some money. Any one that can identify the place and the amount may have same. I will give you a clue. There wasn't a half bushel, but there was over a peck. Signed, Aaron McPherson.

"Well, I guess he came out of it with plenty," Rowe advises, bought a farm down on Green "because he quit hog hunting, River near Rumsey, and lived happily ever after."

Illinois Club Hears Dickson

"U. S. Commemorative Coins" was the theme for a recent meeting of the Henry County, Ill., Coin Club, according to an announcement by newly elected secretary Lawrence Wabel.

Ralph Dickson was speaker for the evening. Wabel said, and gave a very interesting talk on commemorative half dollars. He pointed out the rare types and also quoted the current Red Book price of each coin, as compared to the price of the same coin a few years ago.

His talk was supplemented with Coin Slides Number Two, furnished by the American Numismatic Association.

The Henry County club will next meet on December 12 at the Hotel Kewanee, Kewanee, Ill., beginning at 7:30 p.m. A.N.A. slides will also be shown at this meeting, and will feature commemorative coins and medals.

Other officers of the Henry County club are Jim O'Conner, president; Leroy Reed, vice president, and Frank Horack, treasurer.

Salinas Club To Meet

Salinas Valley Coin Club, Salinas, Calif., was scheduled to meet recently at the 40-70 clubhouse at the Salinas Municipal Airport. The program was to include a coin auction.

tive. The dot over the i in receive is on the left instead of the right of the dot over the i of milled below. Base of x in Sixty in line with instead of lower than base of adjacent t. Left end of v in receive curls up like the genuine bill. Complete p in passed while in the genuine the lower part of p is missing.

September 26, 1778; \$60: The word or in each use slants downward to the right. The first c in according is low. The left end of v in receive curls down instead of curling up.

14th January, 1779; \$80: Crude. In first Eighty ht tilts to right. No space between inGOLD.

14th January, 1779; \$80: Upright of t in first Eighty slightly left instead of right of upright of E below. Tail of R in Resolution ends over center of f below instead of to the right of f.

Notes-Stamps . . .

(Continued from Page 14)

always stimulates one's interest in his hobbies and makes them seem very much more worth while.

It will be found that some other hobbies than stamps are also not so distantly related to bank notes. There is autograph hunting, and there is genealogy. Every issued note has two signatures, and these represent the ancestors, perhaps, of living descendants in our midst, possibly of some that we happen to know. Historic names are sometimes seen, as that of Sam Houston, first president of the Republic of Texas, and that of Joseph Smith, Jr., founder of the Mormon church.

Human interest stories and incidents are continually coming out of the album as you show it to this friend or that. What a genuine collector's thrill you experience when your visitor suddenly and excitedly tells you that the little girl on this note was his own Aunt Jane, and that the signature of the president is that of his great-grandfather! He had heard something about their being on the notes of a Southern bank, and here he has at last actually seen one.

And when you learn more from him about his ancestry you discover that you have the autograph of another member of his distinguished family, on another note of the Republic of Texas, the second president of that Republic. And so it is that one specimen after another in the album comes to acquire a little special distinction of its own, upon which a little fond lingering is indulged each time the pages are turned. So many new things are thus to be learned about our notes, and are continually being learned, concerning both the technical and the human features of their history, that the album becomes a never ending source of entertainment.

The question may be asked, are there essays and proofs, as with stamps? Proofs there are indeed, and there are even collector who specialize in proofs; but to be able to say that a design is an essay one must know that it was not actually adopted as a note, which is not always possible since no complete descriptive catalogue of bank notes exists. As is the case with stamps, the proofs are printing made with extra care on special paper (usually India), and result in specimens of exceptional brilliance and beauty. In addition, die proofs of many of the individual vignettes exist, on India paper backed by cardboard, but they do seem to be very plentiful. Occasionally one is lucky enough to find vignette proofs that match some of the designs on his notes.

Paper and water marks are other subjects for study in bank note collecting, as they are in philately. Most of the paper on which bank notes were printed was the hand made product of the ancient and honorable Ivy Mills, near Philadelphia, an establishment that had made the paper for the colonial notes years before the Revolution, and which was operated by the same Wilcox family for generation after generation until years after the Civil War.

Its history has been briefly written by the last of the Wilcox descendants, and those who delve into this subject will wish to peruse it, and will no doubt feel a certain pride in the unusual record disclosed. The authoritative books of Dard Hunter on paper making also treat the subject special hand paper that was made for bank notes. It was generally rather thin, but of a fairly tough texture and withstood the vicissitudes of circulation moderately well, though it does not compare favorably with the much heavier and stronger paper used for our money today. As to watermarks, they are to be found occasionally,

as emblems or large letters, but to what extent they were used is one of the wide open fields for investigation.

There remains to be said a word about condition. The condition standards for paper money are not quite as rigorous as for stamps, and rightly so. Bank notes were made to circulate, and many of those that have come down to us today are badly soiled, partly torn, with perhaps a bit of corner missing, and often very much wrinkled and dog-eared. Wonderful deeds of restoration, however, are easily accomplished.

Immersion in a dry-cleaning fluid and brushing with a camel's hair brush, moistening and pressing to iron out the wrinkles, trimming off the ragged edges, and a little patching on the back perhaps, these operations often change a hopeless looking specimen into one that is quite presentable. The collector expects a fair proportion of notes of such quality, and those with only minor imperfections, small mends and restorations, or knife slits or punches to indicate cancellation or redemption, but with reasonably clean faces, especially if they are rare, he accepts with little discount.

There are also many notes, unsigned and undated, that were never put in circulation, having never been used therefore as money. They are unused remainders left in the bank upon its failure or dissolution, or after a change of issue, and are sometimes seen in complete, uncut sheets (usually four notes to a sheet). Some collectors prefer notes that were in actual circulation, even though in poor condition, to those that were unsigned and never used. On the other hand, there are those who especially like this kind, and prize them because of their immaculate condition and preservation of every detail of design. (From the Essay-Proof Journal, 1944.)